

# The Alexander Thomson Society NEWSLETTER



Nº 5 OCTOBER 1992

## 'We only does it to annoy...'

Alexander Thomson once described the carefully proportioned massiveness of Egyptian architecture as 'imperishable thought'. If it was not for the fact that, owing as much to human agency as the weather, nothing in Glasgow seems to be imperishable—quite the reverse, in fact—the phrase could well be applied to Thomson's architecture.

Thomson is a deeply serious intellectual architect, who considered every detail, every relationship, every proportion, or he is nothing. That is why his work matters; that is why this society has been founded and why we all have joined.

The transcendent sophistication of Thomson's designs makes the crass mutilation of his buildings all the more distressing. To outsiders, it seems inconceivable that such highly regarded works of architecture, masterpieces in the supreme European tradition, could be so badly, so thoughtlessly treated. In this *Newsletter*, we record the gratuitous elimination of mouldings on the Grosvenor Building and the unsupervised application of asphalt waterproofing on the carefully considered horizontal plinths on the St Vincent Street Church. Would the removal of a string course on, say, the Bank of England be tolerated? Or pouring thick black tar over the podium of the Pantheon to keep water out of the crypt? Of course not. Then why are such things allowed here? And why does it seem only to be the tiresome Alexander Thomson Society that annoys people by complaining?

Thomson's extraordinary genius has long been recognised by architects and historians English or American as

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## MORE PHOTOGRAPHS EMERGE

One of the Society's tasks is to collect as much material as we can to document Thomson's buildings, both those which have disappeared and those which remain. This photograph of St Vincent Street Church was taken by E.R. Jarrett c. 1930. Cognoscenti of telephone kiosks will notice two of the rare type K3 concrete boxes below the church in Pitt Street. Designed (like the other models) by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (grandson of Thomson's enemy, the architect of Glasgow University), they were put into production in 1929—which helps date the photograph.

John McKean used some of Jarrett's images to illustrate his article on Thomson published in 1985 in *Architectural Association Files* Nº 9. Jarrett's negatives are now in the Slide Library of the Architectural Association in London, by whose kind permission we reproduce it. Eric Jarrett was an associate of F.R. Yerbury and taught at the Architectural Association between the wars. On his visit to Scotland, he also photographed the Caledonia Road Church, Moray Place and Ellisland in Nithsdale Road—further proof, if needed, that Thomson was never forgotten outside Glasgow.

# 'We only does it...'

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well as Scots: Blomfield, Budden, Trystan Edwards, Richardson, Goodhart-Rendel, Law, Hitchcock, Gomme, Crook, Curl, Watkin. Why do Glaswegians remain wilfully blind to this? In our campaign to save Holmwood, Thomson's finest villa, more coverage has been given by London newspapers than by Scottish ones to the fate of what Colin Amery described in the *Financial Times* as 'one of the most original neo-classical villas in the world'. Why should this be? And why has Scotland, and Glasgow, so often turned its back on the extraordinary architectural achievement of Scotland, and Glasgow, in the past? For Scotland has given great architects to Britain out of all proportion to its population and, in Thomson, Glasgow produced one of the most truly original architects in European history.

I have loved Glasgow for as long as I have known it—for almost a quarter of a century now—and find the continuing neglect of its historic architecture baffling. Yes, of course things are much better than they were: particular buildings are restored—brightened up by having destructive chemicals sloshed all over them—yet large parts of the city remain derelict, resembling not so much other cities in Britain but bombed-out East Berlin before the Wall came down.

But what is so profoundly depressing is the realisation that, deep down, things may not have changed that much. Probe a little, and you soon find that vein of resigned indifference, even that self-hatred born of depression, which did for so much of Glasgow in the 1960s. There is still a widespread acceptance of the second-rate, of the mediocre, as normal and inevitable. There is passive acquiescence in decay, in dereliction, in demolition, as if it does not really matter, or is inescapable in a Victorian city like Glasgow. But it does matter, and it is not inevitable.

Glasgow was once a very great city, renowned for quality and solidity as well as invention. It not only produced Thomson but also Mackintosh and Burnet and many, many others. Money, of course, was what lay behind the phenomenon of the Second City:

money and industry. Times, of course, have changed dramatically. There is much less money and even less industry, and the city has suffered from decades of deep depression, which has left psychological scars. Yet there is no reason for despair, for indifference. *Glasgow is still a great city, one of the finest Victorian cities in the world.* And the past can and must help the future.

It is not shortage of money that is responsible for the all-pervading mediocrity of new architecture here. Choosing a good architect is not determined by economics, nor is it really shortage of money that prevents people from looking after old buildings or resisting vandalism. Most of the horrible things still being done to fine buildings in Glasgow cost money. It is all a matter of will, of being optimistic about the city rather than pessimistic. Glasgow deserves better.

There are many reasons for optimism in Glasgow. The city needs to attract investment, and it surely can. People come here because of the quality of life—and much of that quality comes from architecture, from the legacy of the past. This must not be frittered away but used as a standard for emulation. Glasgow needs to recreate a vital, creative architectural culture; that can only come from caring about buildings, old ones and new ones. It is all a question of quality.

In the continuing regeneration of Glasgow, Alexander Thomson has something to contribute: something positive and inspiring. Thomson, like Mackintosh, is famous. People visit Glasgow to see his buildings. If they are allowed to survive, people will come in even larger numbers. In fact, Glasgow needs Thomson. His buildings are an asset. Why, then, does neglect continue? Why are horrible things still done to them? Why do our politicians seem uninterested? It is all a great puzzle, and a dispiriting one. As Ken Powell wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23rd September: 'If Glasgow lets Holmwood go, it will be admitting, in effect, that it does not believe in itself'. For the sake of Thomson, and that of Glasgow, we shall fight on—with your support.

Gavin Stamp

# LETTERS

## Caledonia Road

In the light of the encouraging news that some £1.6 million is to be spent on the 'rehabilitation' of Caledonia Road Church (*Newsletter* No 2), may I offer a suggestion for its use: as a garden of contemplation in the heart of the Gorbals.

Trees and shrubs are already well-established inside the empty shell. Additional landscaping would be minimal. The costs of a few benches would not break the bank. An environmental artist could contribute to the garden—perhaps even Ian Hamilton Finlay, who would bring publicity and foreign visitors to the site as well as producing a powerful complement to Thomson classicism.

In time, the tower could be restored as a viewing tower (a panorama of steeples of the South Side) and the remaining vestibule area could house a small permanent exhibition on Thomson. Caledonia Road Church could provide a point of focus for interest in Thomson and in the Alexander Thomson Society in a similar—but perhaps more stylish—fashion to the Mackintosh Society's Queen's Cross Church.

I believe Frank Lloyd Wright (whom Professor MacMillan considers to have been influenced by Thomson) once said that he hoped his buildings would make 'beautiful ruins'; Caledonia Road Church could be a very beautiful one.

Dr James McGhee  
Honorary Research Fellow, Glasgow University



Extract from the Minutes of the Alexander Thomson Society Committee, 20th August 1992:  
'Caledonia Road Church:...In view of all the housing going up in the vicinity, Veronica Wright suggested that it could perhaps be used as a church'.

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# LETTERS

## A Solution to the Final Work Mystery?

In a desperate attempt to get his hands on the business, Thomson's partner Robert Turnbull tries one last time...

*Scene: Alexander Thomson's bedroom, 9th April 1875, early. In a double bed, propped up by pillows, Thomson lies seriously ill, breathing heavily, in a darkened room.*

*Turnbull enters at a rush, clutching a small item of drawing paper. Throws open curtains to reveal sudden blast of sunlight hitting Thomson squarely in the face.*

Turnbull (*Loudly*): Mornin', Alex! I say, have a look at this!

Thomson (*croaking and struggling to rise*): What's happening? Is the house on fire? Why are you here so early? And close those damned curtains!

Turnbull (*blithely*): Sorry.

*Does nothing to shade the curtains, continues to speak as loudly as before and thrusts paper towards Thomson.*

Turnbull: See this? Just finished it off yesterday! Damned fine, if you ask me.

Thomson (*falling back on bed*): As you very well know, I wouldn't ask you. You couldn't design a public convenience, let alone a public edifice.

Turnbull: Well, man, just have a look at this!

*(Thomson takes paper, scans it. His face begins to colour and he starts choking)*

Thomson: Good God, man, it's terrible: look at the doors, the hatching... (*breaks off in a fit of coughing*)

Turnbull (*blithely, picking at a bedside bunch of grapes*): Oh? Pity. I was thinking of entering it for the Arran competition...

Thomson (*staring, turning purple*): Are you mad?

Turnbull: In fact, I've already sent it in...

Thomson (*clutching heart*): Aaark!

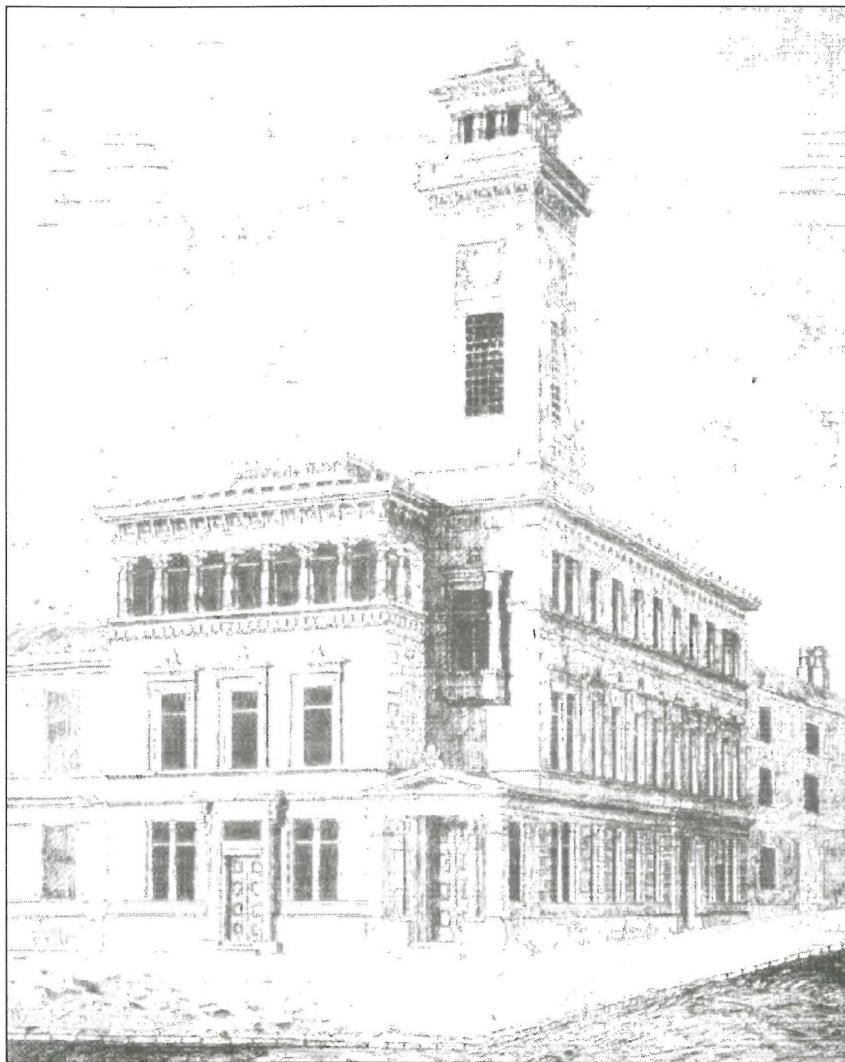
Turnbull: ...and I've stuck your name on it.

Thomson (*collapses*): Oh no...

*(After a pause, Turnbull turns to door)*

Turnbull (*calling*): Oh Mrs T, could you possibly pop in for a moment, Alex seems a little unwell...

Dominic d'Angelo



Thomson Collection, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow

## Arran Town Hall: Thomson's Last Stand

Dr Edwards' detective work on the Master's final work ('Thomson's Last Design', *Newsletter*, June 1992), is magnificent. But whatever this drawing is, clutched in his hand as he finally collapsed, it is not magnificent.

The hatching is naive in the extreme, the perspective gauche, the ashlar joints scribbled in a rough amateurism Thomson would never have allowed and the whole 'naturalistic' sketch, and its washed and hatched shadows, is unlike any Thomson draughtsmanship I've seen (and certainly far from the few known perspectives).

The idea that this was our hero's last drawing is a load of bull turning him in his grave. The worthy Dr Edwards doesn't precisely claim it to be from his hand, but look at the design: the portico is naif; its relationship to the other door absurd.

In fact, the more we look the whole composition seems decidedly bad. If this shows Thomson 'valuing the suggestions of progress which leap upwards into the light of the future where every man would have his own style', well, that's Greek to me.

Rather, it confirms our other suspicion—that there are some dreadfully interesting lacunae in the career of our most revered Master.

Instead of bemoaning this, grieving for him or moralising, why not let us laugh at its awfulness? Not that it's 'awful' like his picturesque heroes, nor 'ugly' like some of his best English contemporaries; it's just bad! Let us laugh in the tone of voice usually reserved for some of Wordsworth's worst doggerel of Beethoven's absurdest pomp.

In humblest respect to the Master,  
John McKean

# EVENTS

## VISIT TO N° 4 GREAT WESTERN TERRACE

**Saturday, 24th October**

We have arranged for up to twenty-four people to visit this property, which was recently purchased compulsorily by Glasgow City Council and is now undergoing restoration.

On Saturday, 24th October, architect Brian Park has agreed to show three groups of up to eight people around the building, at 10.00 am, 10.30 am, and 11.00 am.

Numbers must be limited because of the restoration work being undertaken, and not all the building may be accessible. Precisely because the house is currently a building site, if you wish to take part in the visit, you must book a place by telephoning Pippy McEwen on 041 649 1537. Strictly first come, first served, and don't bother turning up if you haven't booked! Sensible clothes and footwear, please.

### Buildings at Risk

See notice on Page 5.

### Annual General Meeting

See notice on Page 6.

### Winter Lecture Series

We are currently planning a series of winter lectures to follow on from last year's successful season. More details in our next *Newsletter*.

### Alexander Thomson Society Committee

*Chairman:* Gavin Stamp

*Hon. Secretary:* Dominic d'Angelo

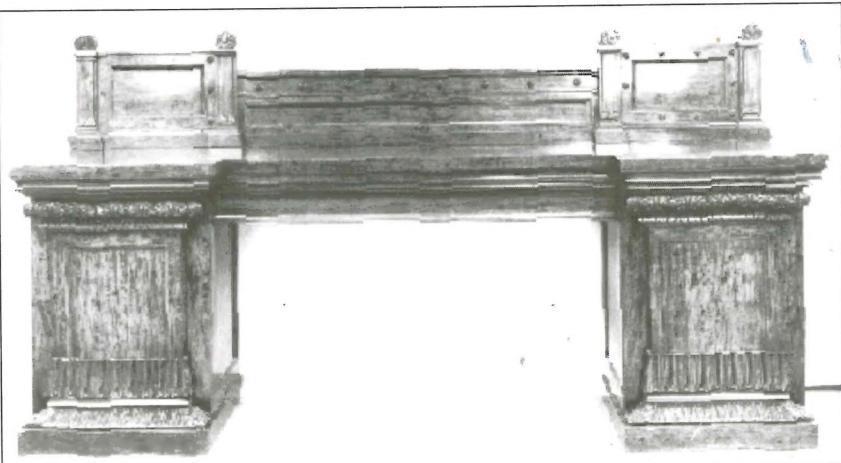
*Hon. Treasurer:* Sam McKinstry

*Hon. Minutes Secretary:*

Veronica Wright

*Committee:* Mark Baines, Roger Emmerson, Roger Guthrie, John McAslan, Pippy McEwen, Alexander Stoddart, Elizabeth Vigue-Culshaw

*Our Patrons are* The Marquess of Bute, Professor Andor Gomme and Professor Andrew MacMillan



## Thomson Furniture?

In the run-up to the 1996 exhibition, Thomson-esque furniture is beginning to emerge. This magnificent sideboard, some nine feet wide, is owned by Christopher Howe, an antique dealer in Bourne Street, London, who specialises in large pieces of furniture and who kindly sent this photograph. Magnificent though it is, we are not sure if it could be by Thomson himself, but it would certainly look well in a Thomson house. In Holmwood, perhaps...

## PUBLICATIONS

### TRADES DESCRIPTION ACT DEFIED

It has been brought to our attention that a book purporting to be a new *Chambers' Scottish Biographical Dictionary* has just been published.

The editor, Rosemary Goring, has graciously included a few architects, but we cannot commend this book as, astonishingly, it does not include the famous Scottish architect who Sir Reginald Blomfield claimed was 'possibly the most original thinker in architecture of the nineteenth century'; who Sir Nikolaus Pevsner called 'a national figure in British architecture'; who Henry Russell Hitchcock thought had built 'three of the finest Romantic Classical churches in the world'. He is the subject of a full biography as well as many articles, and he gave his name to a celebrated travelling scholarship.

We could go on; the shameful fact is that this book fails to notice one of the most original and inventive and famous architects Scotland has produced, namely our own 'Greek' T. Does anyone visit Scotland to see buildings by David Bryce, or that amiable eccentric Sir James Gowans, let alone the dim Edinburgh architect

David Cousin (who?)? They certainly do come to Glasgow to see buildings by Thomson.

It is a mercy, we suppose, that Mackintosh gets in this book: but why his brother-in-law, Herbert McNair, who never built a thing? And Pilkington? He was a highly original designer, but an Englishman.

Whether the culpable blackballing of our hero is simply a mistake, or just reflects sheer ignorance, or is a product of a pathetic Edinburgh prejudice, we do not know. The omission of Thomson's friend, the important Glasgow architect, Charles Wilson, tends to suggest that an Edinburgh view of the world is responsible, but we very much hope not, for we are glad to have several Edinburgh members. But, even though we are delighted to find that two of our great living Scottish architectural historians are celebrated in these incomplete pages, namely David Walker and Kitty Cruft, this book can only be regarded as an insult to Glasgow and a disgrace.

**Do not buy it.**

# CASEBOOK

## BARBARISM

In our last *Newsletter*, Roger Guthrie described how Thomson's design for the Grosvenor Building in Gordon Street had been altered and mutilated in the recent 'restoration'. This elicited a complaint from Mr Michael C. Lowe of Covell Matthews Architects, responsible for the new building constructed behind the retained facade. Mr Lowe considers that we should have made contact with the building owner, developer or architects before making comments. Our reply was that a facade is in the public realm and that no background information is necessary to appreciate the visual evidence, or to compare the present appearance of Thomson's building with its former condition.

In response to Roger Guthrie's comments on the spoiling of the first floor aedicules, Mr Lowe maintains 'that no complete detail remained and the design of any replacement would be pure supposition'. We cannot agree, and we have replied that Mr Guthrie could have gone much further by pointing out that the string course that ran under the palmettes between the first floor windows has now completely disappeared. It is clearly visible in the photograph on p.133 of Ronald McFadzean's *Life and Work of Alexander Thomson* published in 1979, as well as in older photographs, so it would appear to have been cut back very recently.

We are naturally glad that Thomson's facade still stands and we recognise that it has been badly treated over a long period. Even so, we cannot countenance the elimination or mutilation of details on this facade which is, like all Thomson's designs, a work of a high intellectual order and sophistication. Every detail matters. Nevertheless, in making further criticisms to Covell Matthews, we stated that, if they still felt 'mis-represented' in our last *Newsletter*, that we would be happy to publish a statement from them in this number. No reply has been received.

## THOMSON SALVAGE

In the next issue of the *Newsletter*, Mark Baines reports on the building at the corner of West Regent Street and Wellington Street, in which Thomson had his office towards the end of his career. Listed building consent has now been given for the demolition of this building, but we are glad to know that the new building is to have stone facades close in appearance to the original ones,

and that Thomson's two doorcases and his iron railings are to be re-used or replicated in the new building.

A further boon is that we have been offered the interior fittings and that, thanks to the good offices of Mactaggart & Mickel and their architects, G.D. Lodge and Partners, we are now in possession of ten white marble chimney pieces by Thomson, as well as several internal doors with ornamental frosted glass panels. We hope that the glass panels can be used in the 1996 Thomson Exhibition. As for the severe and elegant marble chimney pieces, we are anxious to find homes for these in Thomson buildings where the original fireplaces have been removed. Photographs and measurements will appear in our next issue, but if you are the owner of a house by Thomson which is lacking the proper chimney pieces, please contact the Chairman at the Society's address.

## ST VINCENT STREET CHURCH

We continue to be represented on the Property Review Board convened by the Estates Department of Glasgow City Council to consider the future of this building. We very much hope that it will be possible for the Free Church congregation to negotiate a new lease with the Council at a reasonable level so that it can continue to use the building while a suitable income-generating use can be found for the basement. The Free Church itself has produced a scheme, drawn up by Campbell Mackenzie, to show how the basement might be used for a café, exhibition space, etc.

What is, therefore, most distressing to have to record is the mutilation carried out to the exterior of the church at the beginning of June. We had been unhappy for some time about the standard of repair work being carried out by the Council on the building, but refrained from comment in the cause of good relations. This was probably a mistake, as the men working on the fabric suddenly attacked the plinths and low walls on the entrance front of the building in St Vincent Street with chicken wire and asphalt. Ostensibly to deal with damp in the front basement (whose cause is by no means certain), the new asphalt floor in the area was brought up and over the walls, with the wire nailed to the stonework and then covered in a thick layer of black asphalt. The visual effect is, simply, barbaric.

To apply asphalt rather like icing on a cake, with a pronounced overlap, on Thomson's carefully considered horizontal levels is aesthetically disastrous: this damage will have to be undone in the major restoration of the building which must occur. For the building surveyor acting for the Estates Department to reply that this work was done in accordance with 'the recommendations of the Mastic Asphalt Council and Employers' Federation and British Standard Code of Practice 144 Part 4: 1970' was as irrelevant as it was absurd. Such recommendations might be appropriate for repairing a bus garage, but surely not when dealing with a Grade A listed building which is one of the greatest works of architecture in Scotland. What is appalling is that this work was done without supervision by a competent restoration architect and

*Continued over*

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

### The 'Greek' Thomson Legacy

#### St Vincent Street Church Wednesday, 4th November at 6.00pm

The Glasgow Institute of Architects is holding a second 'Buildings at Risk' evening following the success of last year's discussion. This one, organised in conjunction with ourselves, will address the subject of Alexander Thomson's 'buildings at risk' with the aim of creating greater public awareness of their predicament. The event is supported by Glasgow City Council and will take place in one of the principal Thomson masterpieces currently 'at risk', St Vincent Street Church.

The main speaker will be Lucinda Lambton, architectural photographer and television star. Eddie Riach, President of the GIA, David Martin, conservation officer with Glasgow City Council, Professor Andrew MacMillan and Gavin Stamp will also address the meeting before a general debate takes place.

Tickets are available in advance at £3.00 from the RIAS Bookshop, 545 Sauchiehall Street, from E.C. Riach Architects, 127 Fergus Drive, Glasgow G20 6RY, or at the door on the evening.

# CASEBOOK

*Continued from Page 5*

without consultation with Historic Scotland or the Council's own Planning Department. If anything positive can be said of this sorry affair it is that we hope that, because of the outrage expressed in many quarters, nothing like this can happen again.

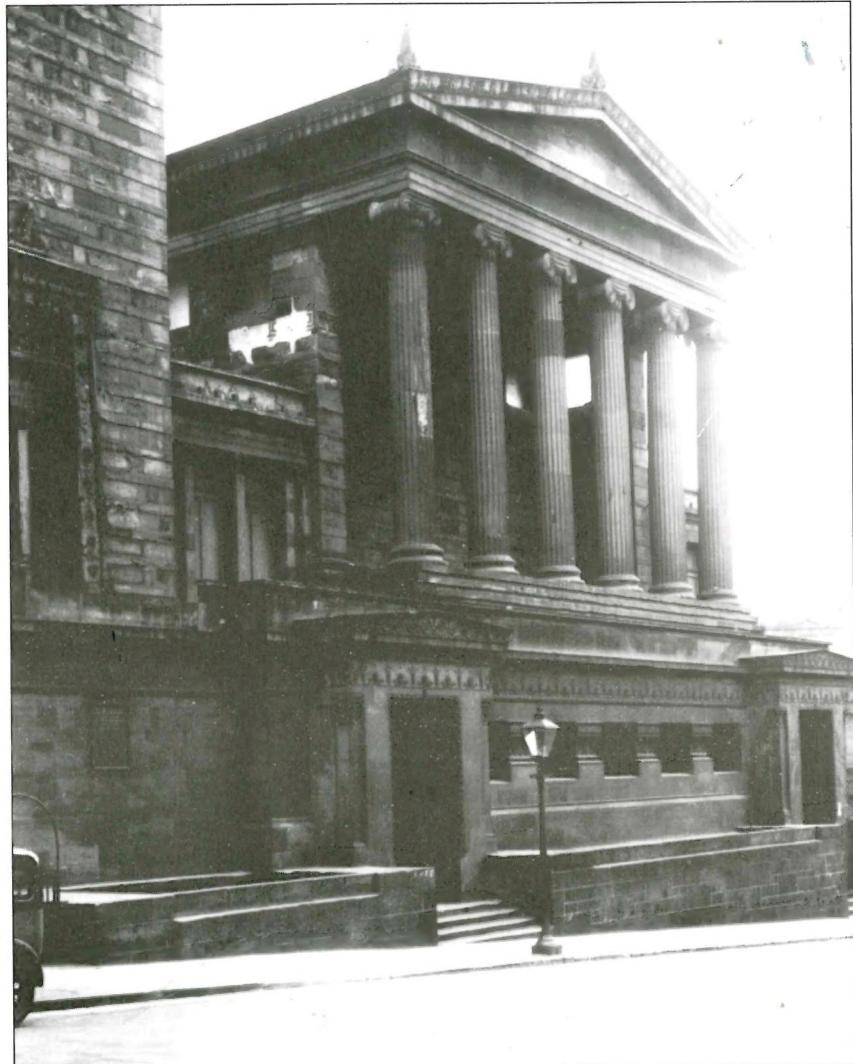
## EGYPTIAN HALLS

In the hope of encouraging the refurbishment of this major building, the Society has commissioned a preliminary feasibility study from Troughton McAslan, architects, offered by our committee member, John McAslan. This has been prepared with engineering advice from Ove Arup and Partners and a financial appraisal by Davis Langdon and Everest. A similar study has also been undertaken by Elder & Cannon, architects, on behalf of the surveyors acting for the owner of the Chinese restaurant in the building, Mr Woo.

These efforts are not intended to be in competition. Our only concern is to see this building treated and used as it deserves, for it is surely to Glasgow's shame that one of the finest and most magnificent Victorian commercial buildings in Britain is only partially occupied and in poor condition. We shall be very happy to support Elder & Cannon's proposals. As stated in our last *Newsletter*, our only reservations concerning the long-overdue restoration of the facade concern the vexed issue of stone-cleaning, for we believe that, in the present state of knowledge about the long-term effects of chemical stone-cleaning and with the public inquiry over the cleaning of the Scott Monument in Edinburgh still proceeding, the use of chemical methods must be avoided.

## HOLMWOOD

The future of Holmwood remains our most serious concern. At the time of



*St Vincent Street Church, c. 1930. Photo: E.R. Jarrett*

writing, negotiations over the house's future have reached a point of crisis. There is cause for optimism, but also for great anxiety. The National Trust for Scotland has, in principle, decided to attempt to acquire the house and open it to the public, while, following the visit to the Trustees in August, the National Heritage Memorial Fund is prepared to offer a considerable sum to effect its purchase.

The principal obstacle to this ideal solution remains the option to purchase acquired by the Carvill Group from the

Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions. These developers have now submitted a planning application for building 38 housing units in the grounds, with 18 units in two blocks of four-storey flats on the Sunnyside site, and the rest in lower building behind Holmwood on the site of the present school buildings. This scheme, prepared by William C. Tait, Architects, of Alloway, is of quite astonishing mediocrity considering the importance of Holmwood and the controversy surrounding its future, and we have lodged an objection with the Planning Department.

We, like Historic Scotland, have always been prepared to accept the compromise of a partial development of the Holmwood grounds as a last resort if it ensures the preservation of the house itself and its transfer to the National Trust. However, the National Heritage Memorial Fund does not wish to see development of the grounds and nor, therefore, do we, especially as the proximity of new flats might jeopardise the efficient opening of the house to the public by the Trust.

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

### Wednesday, 18th November at 6.00pm

We always hope to hold our AGM, if not in a Thomson building, then in an appropriate one of distinction. This year's AGM will be held in the headquarters of the Clyde Navigation Trust, now Clydeport Limited, at 16 Robertson Street.

Designed by Britain's greatest Classical architect of the latter part of the 19th century, John James Burnet, and built in two phases, the building arguably boasts some of the finest interiors in Glasgow.

We are grateful to Clydeport Limited for allowing us to meet in the building, but the size of rooms will present problems over numbers. We must also make a modest charge for refreshments which will be provided. If you wish to attend the AGM, therefore, please apply to the Chairman at 1 Moray Place, Glasgow G41 2AQ, enclosing an SAE.

# THE LIVERPOOL RACQUET CLUB

Richard Mullen in his biography of Trollope noted 'A club provided the Victorian gentleman with a place to read, to eat, to drink, to slumber, to meet friends, to talk, to hear the latest gossip, to play cards and, sometimes, to smoke—and all this away from the reproving glances of wives or mothers. Clubs sprang up for every profession and interest...'

In Liverpool the most opulent was the Conservative Club in Dale Street, designed by F. & G. Holme in 1882–1883 at a cost of some £70,000 (but now, prosaically, the Municipal Annexe). The oldest and most distinguished is the Athenaeum, first opened in 1799 and now in Church Alley.

Other clubs, no longer existing, included the Exchange (established 1832), the Palatine (c. 1854), the Reform (1879), Press (1883), University (1895, premises remain) and the oldest, the Lyceum. Its former home, now a Post Office, was built in 1800–1802 by Thomas Harrison, and included the Liverpool Library established in 1758.

Of an entirely different nature is the Liverpool Racquet Club by William and George Audsley. The Club was established in 1877, but not in the city centre or business quarter.

Upper Parliament Street marks the ultimate edge of the Georgian town's south east development. In nearby Princes Road, Princes and Sefton Parks were the homes of the mid- and late Victorian successful mercantile families. The club provided, under cover, for the playing of squash, racquets, fives and tennis. It had five billiard tables, a library, dining room and bar. It introduced the provision of sleeping accommodation, possibly as a result of the marked social changes in the district, for members unwilling to travel long distances after matches and dinners.

The building and all its contents (apart from anything rescued by looters from the fire) fell victim to the 1981 riots, although the members re-established themselves in the fine Hargreaves Buildings near Pier Head.



This is the answer to Gavin Stamp's enquiry in the *Newsletter* of January 1992. The site is now occupied by sheltered housing, Stanley Terrace, of abysmal architectural quality.

But nearby are four other distinguished and totally different buildings by William and George Audsley. Firstly, there is Princes Road Synagogue (1872), 'a major building of the Moorish revival... complete with minarets (since removed for safety reasons)' (Edward Jamilly 'An introduction to Victorian Synagogues' in *Victorian Society Annual* 1991, p.27, with illustration).

Between the Synagogue and G.E. Street's St Margaret's church and

*Photo: Tristam Spence, The Style of Alexander Thomson, B. Arch. Dissertation, Liverpool University, 1971*

vicarage (1868–1869) is Streatlam Towers (1871), built for James L. Bowes, a native of Leeds, wool broker, art collector and Japanese consul, and described by contemporaries as being in the 'Scotch Gothic' style. It is now a youth training centre.

Bowes was first President (1873–1875) of the Liverpool Art Club. For this, George Audsley designed a Picture Gallery reported by *The Building News* of March 1890, as 'his latest most noticeable work'. Audsley was associated with publications and

*Continued over*

# A THOMSON IN TASMANIA

A transatlantic member has sent a press cutting from the *New York Times* for Sunday, 7th June last which shows the Synagogue in Hobart, Tasmania, built in 1845.

It was designed by James Alexander Thomson, 'a Scot who in 1825 had been transported from England to the Port Arthur penal colony on a minor charge... Thomson, completely ignorant of how a synagogue should look, borrowed a history of ancient Biblical lands from a friend and, inspired by a drawing of Herod's Great Temple of Jerusalem (later destroyed), designed a small copy...'

The synagogue was erected by the Jewish community in Hobart in the garden belonging to a Jewish merchant, the Government having refused

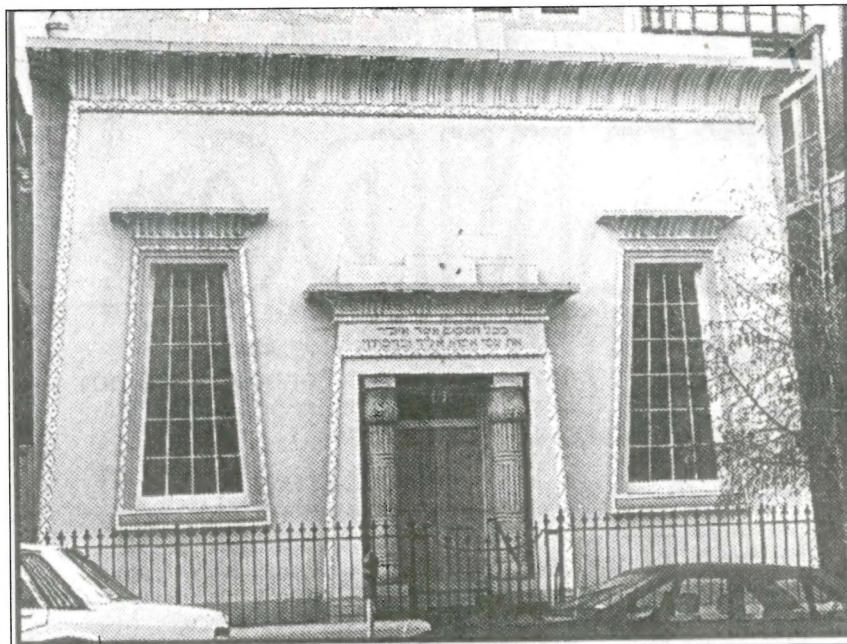


Photo: Australia Naturally

a land grant for the purpose. This 'beautiful little edifice', as one Hobart newspaper described it, remains a landmark. Our own Thomson (no

relation, we presume) was also inspired by such ancient Biblical structures, but we think he could have done better of course!

## CASEBOOK

### Continued from Page 6

What seems absurd is that while public money is being offered to preserve Holmwood on condition that its setting remains inviolate, more public money is apparently being offered by the Glasgow Development Agency to stabilise the underground mine workings to enable flats to be built that no responsible authority wants. This is sheer lunacy.

What we hope for is for Glasgow City Council to take a firm and positive line on this matter. This is an opportunity for Glasgow to acquire another Hill House: a building by a major architect open to the public which will attract visitors to the city. It is an opportunity which must not be missed, or muffed.

Because of the seriousness of the situation, the Society issued a press release in September, believing that the people of Glasgow and Scotland needed to be informed of what is at stake. Articles which greatly assist our cause, and which indicate the degree of national interest in the fate of Thomson's finest house, have so far appeared in *The Herald*, *The Scotsman*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, the *Financial Times*, *Country Life* and *Building Design*, while further articles are anticipated in *The Times*, *The Observer* and *Scotland on Sunday*.

Colin Amery, writing in the *Financial Times*, claimed that Holmwood 'is one of the most original neo-classical villas in the world' and that, 'There is an urgent need for a final push by all the parties concerned to reach a sensible deal that is not based only on commercial considerations. There is enormous goodwill in the air... Holmwood should be the turning point for the public appreciation of 'Greek' Thomson, a European creative genius yet to be fully recognised.'

In a splendid article occupying most of the Architecture page of *The Independent*, Jonathan Glancey wrote that 'What Glaswegians and everyone else needs to see is just how important Holmwood is in the history of 19th century architecture... Glasgow will be astonished by the number of visitors from across Europe and the United States to see one of the most significant 19th century houses: the finest suburban villa of all. If Glasgow allows Holmwood to be spoiled or vandalised in any way, it will regret its indifference before the decade is out.' In *The Daily Telegraph*, Kenneth Powell maintained that, 'The onus... lies on Glasgow Council to protect the setting of the house by refusing consent for development... If Glasgow lets Holmwood go, it will be admitting, in effect, that it does not believe in itself.'

We must hope that those who control the destinies of Glasgow will heed such sane and authoritative opinions.

## Liverpool Racquet Club

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exhibitions by Bowes of his collection of Japanese ceramics.

Halfway down Princes Road the skyline is pierced by the tall slim spire of the High Victorian Gothic chapel for the Welsh Presbyterian congregation (1865–1867), now occupied by damp, rot and pigeons, with school rooms at the rear used by the Brotherhood of Cross and Star. Between Sefton and Princes Parks is The Towers, now a Chinese restaurant, formerly a University Hall of Residence and used in 1967 for the Victorian Society's conference.

The Audsleys appeared to have enjoyed a highly successful career serving a wealthy population in a relatively small area of the city, but...

David Van Zanten describes their design for the now demolished Layton Art Gallery as 'extraordinary'. Gavin Stamp refers to them as 'that enigmatic pair of much-travelled Scots'. How much did their versatility and skill in design owe to their training under A. & W. Reid, architects, of Elgin, N.B.?

J. E. Vaughan